

BAD BOYS FEWER, MORE REFORM, FIGURES SHOW

Complete Statistics for Years 1919 and 1920 Indicate Trend for the Better in Fewer Commitments, Less Breaking of Parole and Reduction in Major Crime—Dr. Christian, Head of Elmira Reformatory, and John S. Kennedy, President of the New York State Commission of Prisons, Speak Optimistically of Scientific Treatment

By WILLIS STEELL.

WHAT of the 1921 crop of bad boys? Is it rich and full, or must this glorious period of holdup fail for lack of nursery nourishment? The crime wave, that one must be born dumb, deaf and insensible in every way not to be aware of, gives rise to this question. Gradually our present Dick Turpins will be eliminated if history should repeat itself, and only the oncoming generation is looked for to fill the places vacated by way of the gallows, the electric chair or imprisonment. Like every other school, the school of crime can only be perpetuated by the kindergarten class.

The prison commissions, the wardens of reformatories, tell a hopeful story. Bad boys are decreasing in number in the various institutions and if the ratio existing between the populations of these places and the penal institutions means anything, it is that there are fewer bad boys growing up in the country than has been the case in the preceding score of years.

John S. Kennedy, president of the State Commission of Prisons, is of the opinion that these figures tell a remarkable story.

"Seventy per cent. of the juvenile delinquents, male and female, from the ages of 16 to 30 placed under probation and having served out a period of surveillance, are never heard of again. This means that they have been saved to society. It also accounts for a diminution in the populations of the prisons.

"The children's courts, the welfare societies, have all done splendid work of reformation and should be highly praised. The judges also, those who have understood what a fine institution such a reformatory as that at Elmira is, for one instance, and have therefore committed to it cases about which there was a saving possibility, have wrought well. It is to be hoped that this understanding may be enlarged and extended. I wish that our judges might personally visit Elmira and appreciate for themselves what the institution is and the kind of work it is doing.

Elmira a Real Laboratory

To Analyze Poor Humanity

Elmira Reformatory is finely equipped for its campaign for the betterment of delinquents. Its comfortable houses, large grounds and farming area, its excellent educational and vocational equipment are unsurpassed by any similar institution of the country. The judges have been assured of these facts by the prison commission, and if any doubt lingers in their minds as to the facts a personal inspection would convince them.

"A tremendous step was taken this year by utilizing the reformatory at Napanoch in a manner advised by increased knowledge of the mental condition of delinquents. This institution was abandoned as a reformatory and all young men sentenced to reformatories are now at Elmira. The last Legislature passed an act which permits the commitment of the defective criminal to the Napanoch institution, which is now known as the State Institution for Defective Delinquents.

"A large proportion of the inmates of penal and correctional institutions are mentally subnormal and those definitely feeble minded will hereafter be committed to Napanoch, where they will be held for a long period.

"Already the institutions and the courts have committed 300 of this class to Napanoch. This procedure will be of benefit to the institution and to the community, as these defective inmates are those who upon release often get into difficulties with the police. There is room at Napanoch for 1,000 patients, as they may well be called."

Subject Fully Investigated

By Committee in 1918

In 1918 a special committee made up of Frank E. Wade, John S. Kennedy, Sarah L. Davenport, George W. Davis and Allan J. Holloway made a report to the Legislature of its investigation on the matter of mental disease and delinquency. In its summary the committee said:

"The most depressing part of the situation is that New York State, with all its vast expenditure of money to detect, try, convict and punish the criminal, is not repressing crime because 60 per cent. of the population of the various penal and correctional institutions of the State have served previous commitments.

Of the 2,279 felons received into the State prisons during the year 1917 87 per cent. were repeaters. With each new group of repeaters in cost of trials, etc., the State spends approximately \$2,000,000.

In the chronic repeater (recidivist) is found the crux of the whole criminal problem. His existence to such a large extent among the inmates of prisons is of itself proof of society's failure to repress crime or to reform the criminal.

Mr. Kennedy, commenting on these conclusions, said:

"At the last conference of prison commissions the hard boiled wardens who had sneered at psychiatry and its information admitted that there was something in it. I express myself too mildly; all are willing to try what can be accomplished with this new aid to reform.

"Every student of criminology has learned almost at the outset of his studies that the most important single factor found associated with chronic criminalism is the abnormal mental condition of the criminal himself. Well authenticated facts are at hand to indicate that at least 60 per cent.

of the inmates of prisons and reformatories exhibit mental abnormalities and are in need of much more specialized treatment than is afforded by the ordinary routine methods employed in the average penal institutions; that from 27 to 30 per cent. of such inmates are feeble minded and only possess the intelligence of the average American child of 12 years or under.

"A start has been made by making the Napanoch institution a clearing house for Elmira and other institutions of a correctional purpose. Delinquents and criminals sentenced to the various penal and correctional institutions of this State will receive close study at the clearing house, with its medical clinic attachment, and when the method of reconstruction is determined upon they are then to be distributed to the various penal institutions according to the needs in each case.

"It is a great step toward finding the best way of handling the problem generally, and particularly is it the right way with juvenile delinquents. Take Elmira, for example; by having such a clearing house in Napanoch the warden is able to establish an actual physical segregation of certain types, and this helps him solve the discipline problem.

"In the treatment of bad boys the object after all is so to reconstruct the personality of each one that he may be restored as promptly and as permanently as possible to his normal relation to society. A complete reformation is rarely accomplished within prison walls and much depends on after work. But—"

Here what Mr. Kennedy said should be given a line by itself:

"The number of bad boys is steadily decreasing and the records of all institutions in which our commission is interested already show that the crop of 1921-22 is going to be agreeably less.

"The chief reason for this is, I repeat, because an effort along intelligent lines is now being made to discover the mental disease, deterioration or feeble-mindedness before they are sent to prison. Taken thus by the forelock crime is preventable."

A day at the children's courts, either in New York or Brooklyn, would be sufficient to allay any undue enthusiasm because of the reforms thus far under way. There are still strange cases presented and queer developments which augur ill for the future career of the youth under examination. There are still a lusty lot of bad boys around.

DR. FRANK L. CHRISTIAN,
Head of the Elmira Reformatory, who strongly advocates scientific treatment of criminal boys.



Not all are to be excused on the ground of a mental or physical defect; in fact a grist sent the other day to the Children's Village, the Jewish Protective and other safe places seemed just a little brighter than the ordinary kid.

One would have to be Asmodeus and possess the power to see through roof and wall in order to find whether or not bad discipline or no discipline on the part of parents had made these children "bad."

Judge Talley feels quite sure that the majority of the bad boys brought to his court as prisoners are children spoiled by their natural guardians. He has advised the return to the wholesome use of the birch. More whippings at home, says he, would mean fewer child criminals at the bar of justice. In imposing sentence the other day on a prisoner charged with grand larceny and burglary Judge Talley denounced the youth as a "leper" and a "plague" against whom the public was to be protected. He did protect it in the case of this twenty-three-year-old criminal by sending him to Sing Sing for the maximum term of ten years.

There were no alleviations to be pleaded for this young criminal because of defect in mind or body, and the one used by the prisoner's counsel that his crimes were due to a doting mother did not get sympathy from the Judge. His feeling is strong that

parents have no business to "dote," but should do their duty by children in administering punishment at home.

How many bad boys are created by over-indulgence and foolish forgiveness with no penalty attached can only be conjectured. This type of bad boy, however, we have always with us.

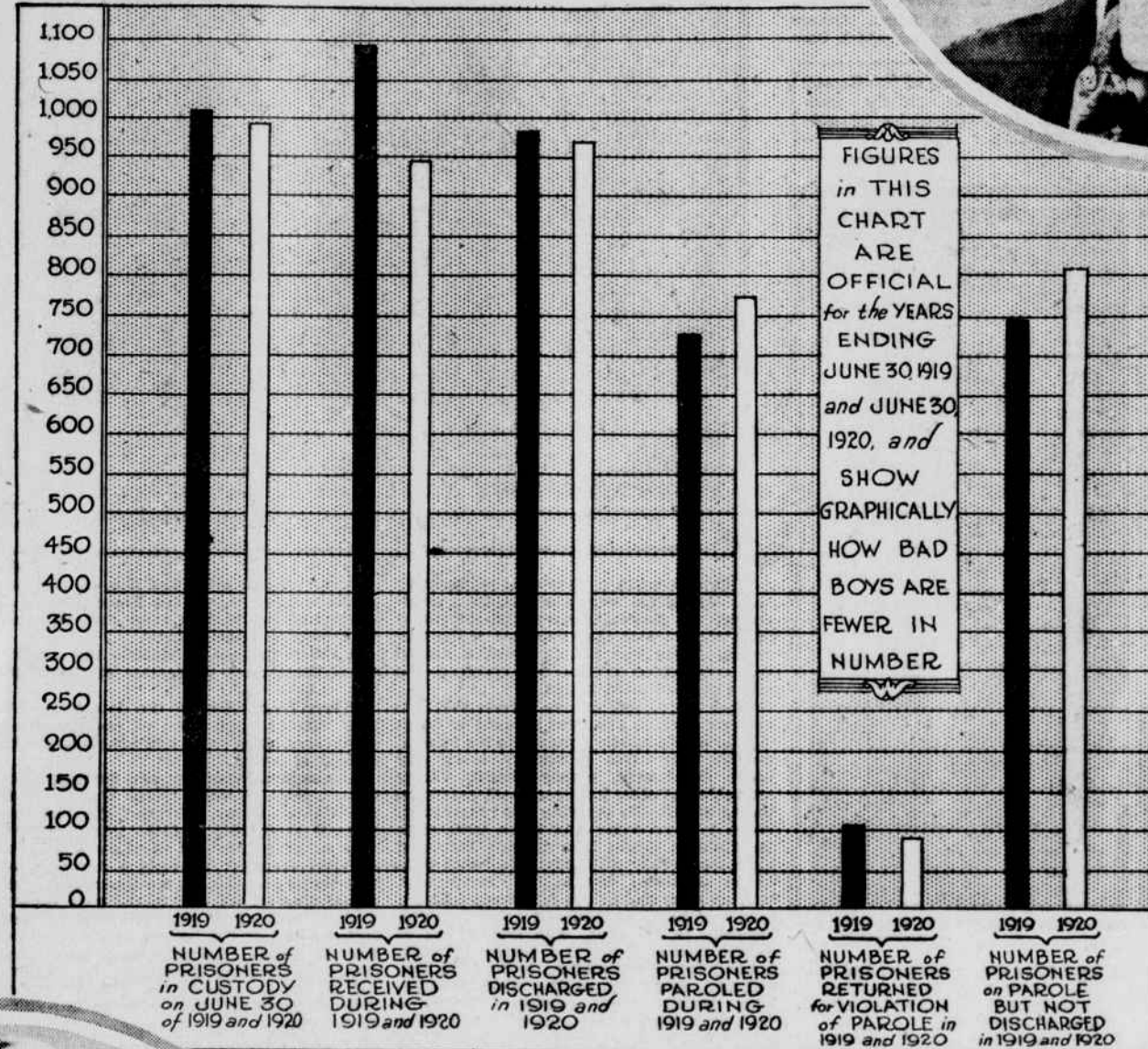
At the prison conference held at Jacksonville, Fla., recently George L. Sehon of Kentucky, a member of the committee on juvenile delinquency, made a report on the boy criminal. In part it read:

To-day I stand a subscriber to the optimistic belief that juvenile delinquency is not now on the increase. This note of hope and encouragement is sounded by a

York State for the last three or four years. However, John Tremain, secretary of the commission, stated last week that there had been an increase during the last few months in these commitments.

Frank L. Christian, superintendent of the New York State Reformatory at Elmira, has sent the following figures to be incorporated in this article: The population of Elmira and Napanoch from 1910 to 1916 was 1,691; from 1916 to 1920 the average population of these two institutions was 1,026. The population at Elmira to-day is 1,085.

There was a marked decrease in the number committed during the war; at one time the count during this period ran as



JOHN S. KENNEDY,
President of the New York State Commission of Prisons, who tells of new penal methods.

and to study the mental peculiarities of his charges.

In each case the boy has been studied in the psychological laboratory and the results of these mental examinations have demonstrated that not even one of the 150 boys studied at Elmira and assigned to this special training class could be considered normal. It has been established that the incorrigible suffers from a physical or mental defect which probably explains his actions in the reformatory just as it did his actions before he was sent there.

A careful observer of these types, while possessing no special knowledge of either psychology or psychiatry, says of the incorrigibles:

"They appear to be in a grade by themselves. Nature for some reason appears to have denied them most of the attributes of normality. In temperament they are nervous to a degree and they are physically, as well as mentally and morally, unbalanced. What makes their condition more depressing to witness is that they are ignorant of their condition, and having no power of introspection they are unable to see their foolish actions as other people see them. There are among them as many types as individuals and each bad boy must be dealt with as an individual case, distinct from the others."

The incorrigibles in Elmira number (usually) not more than 2 per cent. of the entire reformatory population. About 10 per cent. of the population of the reformatories may be considered segregable—in need of custodial care—but this figure includes the mentally defective inmates who may be tractable, occasioning the institution little trouble in discipline, yet still be unfit to be at large permanently.

The problem in reference to the incorrigible boys is whether or not they shall be permitted to go back into the community and continue to be the menace they were before their commitment. The real question takes on a material aspect: Is such a boy useful or useless; is he a danger and unfit for freedom; would his being at large interfere with the wellbeing of society?

Every One of the Bad Boys

Truly a Mental Case

Before answering these questions—if any student of life is bold enough to answer them—it is to be remembered that while these bad boys are called incorrigible, the true basis of their incorrigibility is their mental inferiority. Of the 150 members of this class segregated at Elmira every one is a mental case.

Another bit of statistics not to be forgotten is this one: more than half of the bad boys released from institutions on parole have violated its conditions and have been recommitted. Unable as they are to compete successfully in the industrial world, unless parents or friends are active in their behalf, disaster quickly overtakes them. The incorrigibles cannot make their way alone and soon become the easy tools of crooks or schemers who may want them to "hold the bag," or in some way act as accomplices in nefarious acts.

But is this type of "bad boy" to be permanently incarcerated? One revolts at such a sentence for unfortunates and it is probable that the middle way is the right one. This looks to some form of permanent custody or custodial care. And with the development of the special training class, which is a new thing and only now being tried out, more and more incorrigibles may be saved.

It is pleasant to be able to end on a more cheerful note. Leaving out these mental and physical defectives, the record from the Elmira Reformatory of the average paroled inmate is very good. Of 567 paroled in 1920, 500 have complied with the conditions of their release and are in good standing with the institution. Figures showing almost equally good results were reported at the Jacksonville conference from similar institutions of other States.

The bad boy is with us, yes, but it is possible to take heart, for the wardens of the country, the welfare societies and the children's courts say that he is getting fewer.

low as 650. There is a very close relationship between industrial conditions and commitments for criminal acts. During years when labor is in demand and wages high the records show a less number of commitments to penal institutions, and conversely, when industrial conditions are at a low ebb the unemployed are in frequent conflict with the law. The least desirable of the unemployed—those first dispensed with when work becomes slack—are the number from which the reformatory population is largely recruited; thus in 1908, a year following financial and industrial depression, the reformatory received 1,500 inmates; while during the years of the world war, when men were in utmost demand and wages extraordinarily increased, the greatest number received in one year was 700.

Dr. Christian, Superintendent, Explains the Figures

In elucidating these figures Dr. Christian said:

"It appears that the size of the reformatory population has always been, and probably will continue to be, greatly affected by industrial conditions. We get the lowest stratum of society, a stratum that for one reason or another cannot or will not adjust itself to social conditions. In extraordinary times like those of the last few years adjustment is easier; the line of cleavage therefore runs lower down and the stratum is less in quantity and poorer in average quality.

"Statistics indicating the number who conduct themselves properly after release from correctional institutions are likely to be misleading. It is necessary to have a record of these individuals over a considerable number of years before final judgment can be passed. Many of the published figures show altogether too high a percentage of recoveries.

"For instance, of the 599 men paroled from Elmira in 1919 and 1920, 87 per cent. are still conducting themselves in accordance with the conditions of their release. After reporting for two years on parole most of these men will be granted final release from the jurisdiction of the reformatory; there will be some among them who will again relapse into crime.

"If we consider the statistics covering paroles for a period of ten or fifteen years and class as a failure every inmate who did not in every respect live up to the conditions under which he was released, we find that 67 per cent. can be classed among the successes.

"It is well to remember that 75 per cent.

of the men received at Elmira have already been in some correctional or eleemosynary institution or have extensive police records and have failed to comply with the conditions of their release from such juvenile institutions.

"The reformatories for boys, both juvenile and intermediate, have many difficult problems sent to them and their percentage of recoveries, considering the material with which they work, is high and their efforts creditable. It must be borne in mind that it is only failures about which the public is generally informed. These institutions cannot point with pride to their successes; they are perhaps the only institutions of an educational character which are made prominent by their failures."

Never before, it is Dr. Christian's opinion, have there been so many influences at work as there are at present for the conservation of youth. He adds that it is usually the boys who have failed to respond to the efforts directed toward their reclamation who finally are sent to correctional institutions. In conclusion he uses these words:

"I am optimistic for the future and believe that the delinquent youth of our land will respond to the efforts society is putting forth for their betterment."

In every institution designed to reform bad boys there are found some who refuse to adapt themselves to the routine of the place and by their frequent conflicts with the discipline earn for themselves the term incorrigible. This small group, for it is seldom numerous, stir up trouble among other inmates who ordinarily would be well behaved. The management of this class, whether in the home or in an institution, is still a difficult problem.

Segregating Incorrigibles

Important Part of Work

Nowadays it is customary to take the so-called incorrigibles from the other inmates and give them sleeping rooms, dining room and a general work, instruction and recreation room apart from the others. In Elmira space was made for this segregating this class when Napanoch took away the hopeless defectives. There the bad boys receive a certain amount of school of letters instruction and do some manual work, part of which is to keep the grounds and that part of the building assigned to them in good condition. Most of the day is given up to outdoor sports or indoor games. A special officer, noted for "horse sense," is over them to control and direct